/190 cont./

thanks to their firearms. It seems that, as a result of this incident, the Makiritare and the northern group of the Sanemá lived together more peaceably, and today it is rare to find a Makiritare settlement in that zone of the Ventuari, Erebato, and Caura, without a few Sanemá groups in the immediate vicinity.

The clash of the two cultures began a process of progressive acculturation, and the hunters and gatherers of wild plants adopted a superior culture: from then on they would be agriculturalists. Furthermore, the genetic constitution of the two tribes underwent profound changes, and that of the minority group will perhaps be absorbed by the Sanemá in a relatively short period of time.

This process of acculturation and genetic absorption is interesting, for one is in the habit of thinking that the Caribe have always been the victorious and dominant invaders. But in this concrete case the process seems to be working in the opposite direction. The advance of the Sanemá, who adopted, among other things, the art of navigation, has brought about the isolation of the two large Makiritare groups: the Yecuana (Decuana) of the Ventuari and Caura on the one hand, and the Cunuhana of the Cunucunuma on the other. Prior to this, these two groups used to visit each other frequently, their members were related to each other, and strong family ties existed between them. At the present time the Makiritare youths know only partially the rivers and routes of those regions traveled so many times by their fathers, and they travel in small groups, overcome with deep anguish every time that they have to cross the zone occupied by the Sanemá. What was observed on the trip on the upper Ventuari fully confirmed this opinion for us, for there is not the least doubt but that the Makiritare captain, who, together with our five traveling companions, had fought eight years previously against the Sanemá, felt ill at ease on leaving the Makiritare rancherías behind, and his nervousness suddenly increased when one day we came upon a Sanemá raft on the bank of the river. They could not hide their nervousness when inland, in the selva, we came across a conuco and seven houses recently vacated. They always

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123 who are always capable of taking it into their heads to walk out just when the expedition has reached the most dangerous point in the whole forest.

Among races less advanced than our own, it is memory, rather than intelligence, that is defective. Indians forget very quickly indeed. Two hours later, Luis Antonio asked for the gun so that he could go and get something for the pot. We still had three cartridges, and the river-bank, at night, is the haunt of a good many unsuspecting animals. I gave him the gun, and the three shots went on a lapa. The beast was far from cleanly killed, but its arrival was providential. It weighed over twenty pounds. We cooked it and ate it that same night, before dawn.

Going down the Merevari in the sunshine was a most pleasant experience and brightened our spirits considerably. When we came to broken water, Solituan, who was just a 'passenger' with no paddle, held back the water with his hands. We tried not to smile: the old fellow was a reclaimed Samatari, a fine type, and we were very fond of him. He still looked on us as superhuman beings and delighted in our physical presence. One or twice, when he thought we weren't looking, we saw him eyeing us with admiration, and expressing it in little guttural grunts.

123 A few hours above Llantariña there are some big rapids where the river 502 takes one roaring plunge down over a granite shelf, while to the left a side-[133] stream makes its way more quietly through a rocky channel where the current is extremely swift but without any sudden falls. Uarema irritably made up his mind: after inspecting both ways of getting down, he decided on the secondary channel, claiming that he and his brother had shot it on one occasion. We disembarked and went down to the foot of the rapids where the rushing waters were swallowed up with a dull rumbling noise in a wide pool of whirling foam. Here we waited for our more daring companions.

Now, as never before, we cursed the accident to our cine-camera. We had no chance of filming that hair-raising descent. The canoe looked quite insignificant at first, up there on the lip of the falls. Then it came on as if it was flying, growing larger with every split second. Halfway down, with Uarema and Hashimo howling in imitation of the Makiritari on similar crazy ventures, the craft began to swing round till it was broadside on to the stream. We gave it up for lost, but as it swept on it glanced past a small rock and righted itself again, bows forward. Seizing their opportunity immediately, the two Indians

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brought the canoe shooting past us like an arrow, to finish up in the big pool, where some hard paddling brought them to the bank.

At Llantariña we found many signs of Guayca occupation, but there was no one about. Luis Antonio urged us on, as usual, explaining that we should catch up with his people further down, at what he called 'Wide-Beach River'. As it turned out, we found them there, in a rough encampment on Samatari lines—if it hadn't been for the fact that some of the faces were half familiar, and that a few of the men were wearing loincloths of red material we had provided, we might have taken them for Samatari.

'They've come here after the fruit, because it's the dry season.' Such was Luis Antonio's explanation, but it contradicted what he had said not long before, when he had assured us that his people had crossed the river because they feared an enemy attack. 'Much war,' he had told us then. Our man had been trying to give a heroic touch to what was very simple fact: his people were out looking for provisions, they weren't on the war-path at all. But this betrayed their nomadic origin, which Uarema, who knew civilization and knew how far removed the Samatari were from it, was anxious to disclaim and conceal. He had reached that stage of sophistication where he preferred to accept and admit the barbarism of war but not that of hunger.

When we slept with the Uarema Indians that night it was just like being back among the Samatari, such was the resemblance between these tribes and so similar their behaviour. Once more we ate the sacred *soyab* and a whole series of fruits we were familiar with, and went round sampling little leaf-parcels which the Guayca, with genuine hospitality, were pleased to offer us. There was tapir, deer, lapa, guan, curassow, all sizes of fish, bananas, cassava-bread in the Makiritari style, fine pawpaws and little pineapples—the kind that burn the lips.

The effect of such abundance on us was euphoric. Did our euphoria then spread to the Indians, or was it the other way about? A general dance started, with all the old songs, but for us at any rate it was soon over. In our weak state everything began to go round and round before our eyes, and we felt slightly sick. Hashimo was grinning. He looked rather like an animal let out of its cage, as he went about talking to his kinsfolk, who were crowding round like monkeys to listen. He was making gestures towards Enrico and me, evidently telling about various incidents of our captivity. Then I shouted out, in the Samatari medicine-man's tone, and imitating his vocal effects:

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gave him nine metres of cotton cloth and sent him home, highly delighted, with all his companions.

To cross from the Turucuma to the Merevari, according to our reckoning, should take us two days, along a well-beaten track much used by the Indians in their frequent comings and goings between the two rivers. But owing to the excessive weight of our baggage the two days became five, because we had to cover each stage of the journey twice. The Makiritari played another trick on us here: at the last minute they produced a number of Shirians from Pulipuli out of a hat, by some conjuring trick, and made them do the work for them. Naturally the Shirians claimed that we ought to pay them, even if payment only amounted to a small piece of cloth and one machete. Any attempt on our part to put this injustice right would have been over-optimistic, and would probably have had unpleasant consequences: there was nothing to do but submit ourselves once again to the caprice of the 'superior race'.

On the last lap of the portage, when we were waiting for the Indians to come up from the previous halt with the last of the baggage, a horde of savage Shirians came along. At first we were alarmed. To judge by their hair they were Guayca or Samatari, but they presented an extraordinarily squalid appearance. Nevertheless, they must have had some gleam of humanity in them, because the leaders—including two old fellows who looked more like champion cattle than anything else—came forward unarmed, after making a great show of laying their bows and arrows on the ground so that the gesture shouldn't be lost on us. They were Ukumatari, a tribe living in these parts: they had sent their emissaries on a courtesy visit to Kirisochi last year. Little by little they came crowding up on us in our little hut-shelter: we had a job to keep a clear space for ourselves and prevent them from surrounding us completely. At last Pedro came along, having out-distanced the main body of porters, and at the sight of this invasion he looked badly scared.

'Samatari?' he asked, setting down the load he was carrying on his back, and keeping his eyes averted.

'Ukumatari!'—the response came in a chorus from those nearest us, as if they were anxious to make a good impression.

At that, Pedro looked more himself again, and began to eye the Ukumatari-Shirians carefully, seeking for a familiar face. He had lived round the Turucuma for a long time and must have had some previous contacts with these

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people. But he didn't seem to recognize anyone in particular, and once more he hung his head and stared down at his feet.

No one seemed to know quite what to do next, so I decided to get what advantage I could out of the situation and suggested to the Ukumatari that they should help carry our baggage as far as the Merevari—which would save us a whole day and night. Their chief—who needed no encouragement to show off his battle scars—agreed to this readily enough, and a few hours later the straggling caravan of the Guayca Expedition arrived on the Upper Merevari bank, near a *maloca* that the Soto Indians occasionally used.

VI

Long and laborious were our attempts to get the loan of three canoes. We had to start by doctoring all the invalids in the area: one of our patients was an old fellow with a terrible sore—evidence of Leishman's Disease—on the back of his hand. The fame of the riches we were carrying was soon spread by our guides, who were quite willing to bask in the reflected glory of it in front of the local people, but at the same time didn't want the Shirians to know too much. The Ukumatari served us well, like the good-natured, willing savages they were, but all they got out of it were two boxes of matches for the whole job: this being what they came along and asked for, after consulting with our own men. We were forced to buy two of the canoes we wanted, although we should only be using them for three days. The Makiritari were after our goods at all costs, and a loan didn't suit their purpose so well.

We were two days on the Merevari and one on the Yemecuni, the right-bank tributary stream whose upper reaches run very close to the Yevarehuri and therefore to the Amazon basin, there being no mountains to intervene. There was nothing of any great interest to record on this part of our journey, as far as the mouth of the Camacuni, a tributary flowing in on the right bank of the Yemecuni. Here there was a Makiritari hut, totally abandoned by its people. It was a big round hut, like Pancho's but better finished, its outer clay wall decorated with geometrical designs painted in red, based on the patterns of some of the basket-work. The *conuco* was a big one, and the tracks leading to it still clear and not overgrown. Pedro told us something about these inhabitants of the Camacuni region. From what we could make out, it seemed they

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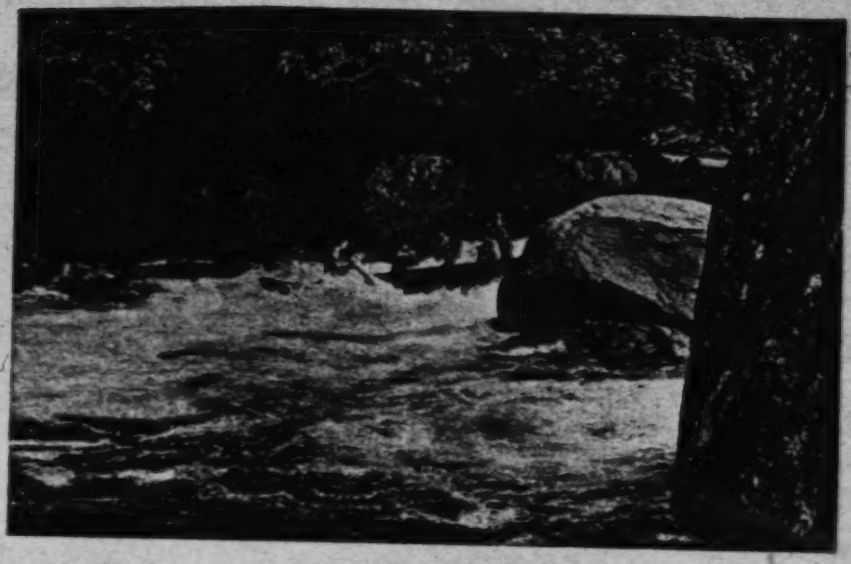

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48. A dramatic moment on the Ventuari.

49. The end of the rapids.

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